

Cllr Edna Murphy

Monthly report October 2023

ENVIRONMENT & GREEN INVESTMENT

Major planning applications update

The decision from the Secretary of State on the Sunnica solar farm application has been delayed. Instead of the expected announcement date of 28 September, the new date is now 7 December.

How do you recycle your household plastics?

To be in with the chance of winning a £50 voucher, take the Pledge2Recycle survey at <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/QBCK2XL> and share your thoughts. The survey is being conducted by RECOUP, the UK's leading independent authority and trusted voice on plastics resource efficiency and recycling. Learn more about how you can better recycle your household waste with Pledge2Recycle at <https://pledge2recycle.co.uk/>

Sustainable Farming Incentive 2023 fund

Applications are now open for the Sustainable Farming Incentive. The SFI pays farmers for taking actions that support food production, farm productivity and resilience, whilst protecting the environment. More information at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-announces-application-dates-for-sustainable-farming-incentive-2023>

Help to insulate your home

If your home has an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) of D to G, and if you are in Council tax band A-D (in England) you may qualify for cheaper (or even free) insulation.

The government has launched a £1bn scheme to help some families insulate their homes. Families in lower Council tax bands with less energy-efficient homes will be offered upgrades such as roof, loft or cavity wall insulation.

You can use an online checker for the scheme to find out if you are eligible. The tool will ask a series of questions – including how you heat your home, whether your home has solid or cavity walls, and if you are receiving any benefits. You can be a homeowner, landlord or tenant (either renting privately or from a housing association). If you're a tenant, speak to your landlord before you apply. You'll need their permission before any insulation can be installed. <https://www.gov.uk/apply-great-british-insulation-scheme>

A separate online checker has also been launched for the Home Upgrade Grant, which will help people in off-gas-grid homes with an Energy Performance Certificate rating of D to G. The grant provides energy efficiency upgrades and low carbon heating to households in England. <https://www.gov.uk/apply-home-upgrade-grant>

If you use the online checkers you will then be referred to either your energy supplier, for support from the Energy Company Obligation programme and Great British Insulation Scheme, or your Council for the Home Upgrade Grant.

Flood action conference

Community flood groups, local authorities from across the Great Ouse catchment and surrounding areas, and industry representatives came together on Thursday 21 September for Cambridgeshire County Council's second flood action conference.

Speaking from the conference, my colleague Cllr Lorna Dupre (who chairs the Environment and Green Investment committee) recorded a short video about how the Council is preparing for climate change, including the importance of protecting our communities from flooding, and the role community flood groups can play:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QanX6Cx5kKE&ab_channel=CambridgeshireCountyCouncil

A14 and Northstowe archaeological finds display

Cambridgeshire County Council has decided a way forward to display archaeological finds from recent digs at Northstowe and the new A14 construction, after a project funded by National Highways and Homes England was put in jeopardy when the contractor went into administration.

The Council has decided to find alternative venues to deliver an exhibition and will be considering different accessible venues in parts of the county linked to the areas where the artefacts may have originated.

Smart street lamps

Cambridgeshire is one of 6 areas to be granted funding to test smart street lamps that can house EV charging hubs and boost wireless coverage including 5G. The County Council has been awarded £220,000 to install 'smart poles' on which to host various smart city infrastructure.

Open Radio Access Network

Cambridgeshire County Council has also been awarded £6,523,645, plus £2,699,740 of commercial funding—a total funding amount of £9,223,385—to trial new mobile technology to improve mobile connectivity in busy locations where many people are trying to use mobile devices at the same time.

HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORT

Weeds and street sweeping

At the County Council's Highways & Transport Committee meeting on 3 October the issue was raised on the relationship between weeds and street sweeping. Some residents have complained about debris from unswept streets (district council) being caught up in weeds from uncleared gutters and gulleys (county council). I was pleased to be reassured that county council officers were entering into discussions with district council officers about how better to align management of our streets, kerbs, gulleys and gutters.

More 20MPH schemes get the green light – but not Bar Hill

Since the last Parish Council meeting, it has been confirmed that Bar Hill's application to extend 20mph throughout the village has not gone ahead. It was a competitive field but even so it is very important to learn from the experience as it is a wasted opportunity not to secure these funds for initiatives that would benefit the village.

The County Council is keen to find additional funding to increase the number of applications it can support. With eighty-eight applications received, it is clear that road safety measures are very popular with residents and local communities.

Free vehicle checks

A series of free vehicle checking events is being organised around the county throughout October, in support of the national campaign for safer vehicles.

Members of the public are invited to attend a free vehicle check session, where they will be taught how to conduct a simple check on their own vehicle and spot potentially dangerous problems. The check consists of examining tyre condition and tread depth, ensuring correctly working external lights and correct washer fluid levels. To assist members of the public, a free top-up of screen wash will be offered to every participating vehicle, as well as free resources to help with subsequent checking.

The events are being delivered by the Vision Zero Road Safety Partnership, of which Cambridgeshire County Council is an active member. The partnership aims to reduce the number of road traffic collisions across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and for zero deaths on the county's roads by 2040. More information on Facebook at www.facebook.com/CambsRoadSafety

Huntingdon Road / Eddington lights – cycle safety concerns continue

During the summer the phasing of the lights turning right to Eddington were changed to see if this reduced the backing up of congestion, and thus pressure on cars to drift into the cycle lane.

Officers have now been back to check what the situation is now that schools are back and new patterns have settled and it is clear that while the phasing has made some difference it has not substantially affected the way in which traffic moves into the cycle lane. Officers are now looking to secure funding for installing wands along the most affected part of the cycle lane as a way to actively discourage cars and vans (and buses!) from physically encroaching the cycle lane.

Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP)

At its Board meeting on 28 September, the Greater Cambridge Partnership decided not to proceed with the revised Making Connections proposals, as they clearly did not have sufficient public or political support. The work on these proposals will stop and not be considered further.

An important aspect of the decision is that although the congestion charge proposals have been dropped we still do have a huge and urgent need to improve public transport. During the consultation and subsequently it is clear there is great public support for this, although equally clearly not for funding from a congestion charge. Therefore as Lib Dem leaders stated:

‘..there are also many ways to improve active travel by providing safer walking and cycling routes, sustainable solutions to last-mile deliveries and behaviour change programmes to support individual and business transitions to greater use of active travel and public transport.

Looking further ahead we emphasise the need for a long term and ambitious transport vision. This would include better buses, trams, light rail and trains; transport hubs where people can safely transfer between buses, trams etc and from bikes or cars; and combined tickets for our journeys... Our area is one of enormous opportunities, we are determined that those opportunities are available to more residents, young or old, wherever they live in our amazing county.’

Non Conservative leaders on the Combined Authority along with the Mayor remain committed to looking to bus reform, to ensure that public transport quality can be improved, and routes can operate where and how they are most needed.

New LHO

We have a new LHO operating who is doing a great job getting through the backlog of issues, reported problems and concern – gradually addressing them, resolving them one way or another and closing them down. There is now a clear system of accountability associated with reporting a highways fault, so that it will actually be dealt with within the stated period of time.

Please encourage people to report problems like this as they are now being properly dealt with and form a vital basis for dealing with urgent and out of cycle repairs to roads and footpaths. This has not always been the case in the past but it is now being done.

A14 and s106 funding for Bar Hill

The following information has been provided by County officers, following the last Parish meeting – this is the remaining A14 funding available and it is not known if there will be further funds forthcoming:

Town/village	Address	Description	Amount
Current S106 contributions			
Bar Hill (S/0851/16/FL)	Land South Side of Huntingdon Road	Secondary Education Contribution - Towards expansion of Swavesey Village College.	18,552.63
		Libraries and Lifelong Learning Contribution - Towards the library service in Bar Hill to purchase additional stock, resources, furniture and/or equipment.	5,085.92
		Primary Education Contribution - Towards the provision of remodelling of existing accommodation at Bar Hill Primary School.	19,937.40

Bar Hill A14 bridge 'bumps'

There has been further discussion between the County Council and National Highways, as well as a wide group of experts involved in the construction of the bridge. It is clear that there has been settling of the sides which make the ramps drop and hence the 'bump'. This is effectively a construction and / or design fault and ultimately is National Highway's responsibility, which they accept. They have been focused on what is the longer term solution for the bridge and the solution they have chosen involves them monitoring the site for up to a year to see whether the movement is continuing, increasing, decreasing or has stopped. After that it will take them time to define and deliver the long term solution.

In the meantime National Highways believes that the interim fix done by the County Council in February this year is sufficient, and are not keen to fund further improvements, which are planned. The County Council has not to date put forward data about the damage to vehicles as evidence of the unacceptability of the interim fix, but after I met with the Assistant Director of Highways this will change. It is important therefore that all incidents where the bumps cause damage, or distress of some sort, are logged on the reporting tool as this is the key point of accountability for the Council staff. They are going to continue to advocate for an effective interim fix, to improve on what was provided in February, and to ensure that National Highways will pay.

LEDs in street lights

A programme to replace the lighting in the County Council's street lights with LEDs is hoped to repay itself over 6-8 years and reducing the Council's energy consumption.

Meanwhile on the Combined Authority

The long-awaited revision of the Combined Authority's Local Transport & Connectivity Plan for Cambridgeshire & Peterborough was vetoed at the September meeting of the Combined Authority Board.

Cllr Wayne Fitzgerald, leader of Peterborough City Council, exercised his right of veto to scupper the plan—apparently to the complete surprise of his own Council Chief Executive, and without speaking in the meeting to explain why. The Plan had already been delayed from the July meeting of the Board, when Cllr Fitzgerald had threatened to veto it.

After the September meeting, Cllr Fitzgerald suggested that his vote had something to do with Combined Authority plans to force congestion charging and low traffic neighbourhoods onto Peterborough. However, this would be impossible even if anyone wished to (which they don't), as Peterborough City Council is the highways authority for the city and thus responsible for any such decisions.

The Board also agreed to commission a review by an independent auditor of the bus franchising assessment—a step forward towards the aim of improving bus services across Cambridgeshire.

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